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ABSTRACT

In 1993-94, Louisiana began implementation of a new personnel evaluation plan that emphasized professional development. A decision was made to explore the use of a professional portfolio for each certified employee of the school system of Livingston Parish. The portfolio process was implemented in all the district's schools, but this report focuses on a qualitative 2-year examination of its implementation in one rural elementary school (grades 3-5) with 23 teachers. It was evident that these teachers' portfolios could be classified along a continuum of meaningful experiences ranging from a scrapbook product to a more reflective process piece. It was apparent that it was the quality of the activity and not the quantity of activities that enhanced the process of instructional supervision. For the portfolio to be a useful tool, the focus needed to be on selection rather than collection. Assessment of the items included in the portfolio promoted discussion and professional growth rather than simply credentialism. The more process-oriented the portfolios, the greater the collaboration and collegiality among individuals. In addition, the more involved the faculty became in developing individual portfolios, the more value was placed on the collaborative culture of the school. Two appendixes contain the teacher self-evaluation form and the professional growth evaluation form from the teacher assessment. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIOS: A CATALYST FOR A COLLABORATIVE WORK CULTURE

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PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIOS: A CATALYST FOR A COLLABORATIVE WORK CULTURE

Introduction

Within the last decade, much attention has been given to the value of a collaborative work environment (West, 1990; Goodlad, 1991; Fullen, 1991). Johnson and Johnson (1987) maintain that the benefits of cooperation among adults which leads to a collaborative climate increase productivity as well as provide for collegial learning through support groups. Through collaborative work ventures professional development of educators is enhanced (Glatthorn, 1987). Collaboration has also been shown to generate reflection, self learning for teachers, contribute to professional growth and development and foster positive interaction with colleagues (Liberman, (1987). In this body of literature, collaboration and collegiality are appearing with increased frequency from which a new framework for school community has emerged (Sergiovanni, 1993; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Little, 1992; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988).

Reform efforts focusing on teacher professionalism emphasize the importance and development of "community" in the school. Within the concept of "community," there is a focus on collaboration and collegiality. Teacher professionalism strategies in relation to collaboration and collegiality have had an impact on measurement of professional growth.

During 1993-94 the state of Louisiana began implementation of a revised controversial personnel evaluation plan. Emphasis was to be placed on professional development and each local agency was to develop a plan within state guidelines to best fit its needs. Prior to the state mandate, the Livingston Parish School System embraced the idea of assessing needs, planning and providing staff development. Therefore, the guidelines set forth by the state of Louisiana merely extended plans of organization for school improvement in the local public school agency.

At the heart of the evaluation plan for Livingston Parish was the belief that change and improvement are facilitated in an environment where everyone views themselves as learners. For staff members as well as students, learning is valued above all else. The system is committed to creating a learning environment which supports students' learning, professional development, innovation and risk-taking.

In the Livingston school system, sharing, collaboration and collegiality are used as means to increase competence among faculty which in return touches the lives of children. Schools characterized by collegiality and experimentation are more likely to implement innovation successfully (Fullan, 1990). Little (1989) ranks collegiality along a continuum from independence to storytelling and scanning for ideas, to aid and assistance, mutual sharing, and finally joint work or independence. The value of collaboration is contingent upon the value, beliefs and competence of the individuals involved. Collaborative cultures, in contrast to contrived collaboration, are deep, personal and enduring (Hargreaves,1989).

With this belief system at the forefront of the evaluation plan in Livingston Parish and a state mandate for greater emphasis to be placed on professional growth, the system through a committee of central office staff, administrators, and teachers solicited input from personnel and a decision was made to explore the use of a **professional portfolio** for each certified employee of the system. The professional portfolio was to provide a critical piece of the picture needed for employees to assess their own professional growth within a given context as well as provide a bases for instructional supervision. With emphasis being placed on this aspect of job performance, employees would utilize skills of reflection and self-evaluation. Portfolios were to be reflective of individuals and their continuous growth process.

> "Portfolios... serve both product and process functions. It is as a process that portfolios can be significant in developing reflection among ... teachers. When teachers make decisions about the way in which they organize portfolios, they begin to reflect about their understanding of their professional roles and responsibilities. The infusion of individual values into each institution's program is an additional benefit for all involved (Ryan, 1992, 3)."

A shared set of beliefs and values was to be a benefit gained by the Livingston Parish School System through use of professional portfolios.

Purpose

As an outgrowth to the much larger project previously adhered to, this paper focuses on a qualitative two-year long examination. It will briefly highlight the results of year one and year two of an evaluation model where one school within the system used the professional portfolio as a piece of the professional growth process. There will be an in-depth analysis of teachers', administrators' and supervisors' responses to the process and its impact on the work culture of the school.

The purpose of this paper is to report a chronology of events and related issues observed and documented in the two year long effort where the professional portfolio was used as a tool in building a community of learners. Specifically, the case study addressed the following questions:

1. What happens in the life of a school when the faculty is confronted with a mandate where professional growth is to be evaluated through the use of professional portfolios?
2. Can such an approach to personnel evaluation become a catalyst for establishing a collaborative work culture?

Methodology

This case study involved one rural elementary (grades 3-5) school in one of the 66 systems in the state of Louisiana. All twenty-three (23) teachers were asked to participate as well as one administrator.

The study utilizes observational, interview, self-report and survey data collected during the first two years of implementation of the use of professional portfolios in personnel evaluation. Data collected were inclusive of the following: professional growth plans, self evaluations, professional portfolios, teacher journals containing written entries, interview notes and open-ended survey responses.

The case study is built around a chronology of major events including the following:

1) Initial meeting with an elected core team to plan strategies for implementation,
2) Training provided for professional personnel in techniques for personal reflection, self-evaluation (portfolios and professional growth plans) and peer collaboration,
3) Initial teacher conferences to develop professional growth plans,
4) Staff development activities based on assessed needs,
5) Monthly core team meetings,
6) Small group meetings,
7) Subsequent conferences,
8) Annual portfolio reviews,
9) Annual needs assessment and
10) State review team site visits.

Participants' responses, perceptions, beliefs and behaviors were analyzed and reported in relation to these key events. Of particular interest were changes in the school's work environment in relation to sharing, experimentation, collaboration and collegiality. Generalizations relevant to a collaborative work culture were formulated and patterns of faculty responses and behaviors were identified.

To begin the process, training was provided for certified and other professional personnel in techniques for personal reflection, self-evaluation and peer collaboration. Personnel were afforded opportunities throughout the process for personal reflection, self-evaluation and peer collaboration inclusive of, but not limited to self-assessment of teaching performance, portfolio assessment and designated peer collaboration time.

The self-evaluation was made part of the overall evaluation process by annual completion of self-assessment. The self-assessment was inclusive of a pre- and post- plan analysis in order to assess actual progress toward objectives as outlined in the professional growth plan. Self-evaluation (appendix A) was completed by the end of the evaluative period and shared with the evaluator at the post-evaluation conference during the portfolio review.

A professional growth plan was to be developed by each employee at the beginning of the period of performance to be covered by the evaluation. The professional growth plan (appendix B) was inclusive of 1) goals, 2) objectives, 3) rationale, 4) action plan for each objective, and 5) evaluation for each objective. The professional growth plan was collaboratively developed by the evaluatee and evaluator and written on standard form provided for this purpose. Following consensus, the form was signed by both and a copy retained by each. The comprehensiveness of the professional growth plan varied among different categories of personnel but was sufficient to assess properly each employee's performance. For example, the more successful experienced personnel,

objectives may be used to explore new, untried and innovative ideas and/or projects. The professional growth plan was reflective of the job description for the position which the employee was assigned and was developed to strengthen of enhance his or her job performance. The plan was written in a way as to reflect the expected performance of the employee.

Portfolio reviews were conducted at the end of the evaluative period. The reviews involved a professional conference between the evaluatee and the evaluator where items included in the portfolio were discussed as to their relevance to teacher evaluation, professional growth and in return the school improvement process. Items to be included in the portfolio would not be the same for all personnel. Even in the area of teaching, teachers' work samples were different due to their focus of improvement areas based on individual self-assessment and administrator observations.

State review team site visits were made by a committee consisting of state department personnel and core team members from neighboring systems. Site visits were inclusive of semi-structured open-ended surveys. Comments were recorded and compiled in a report of all 66 systems. A cumulative and detailed report was written for the one school involved in this study.

Results/Conclusions

The data in this case study were collected in all 32 schools in the district. The school reported in this case study was chosen for an in-depth analysis and additional follow-up interviews because of the visible changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors over the course of two years.

Several key findings emerged from the data collected. First, from the portfolios, it was quite evident that they could be classified along a continuum of meaningful experiences which ranged from a scrapbook product orientation to a more reflective process piece. For example, when asked to describe their portfolios, comments ranged from "the teacher portfolio is a record of attendance at

workshops, seminars, in-services and department meetings" to "my portfolio is not just a collection of things I've done. It's a sharing of information gleaned from workshops and the utilization of that information." In some cases too much emphasis had been placed on documentation instead of reflection. Some teachers literally turned in stacks of products that were part of their "portfolios." Quantity became the issue rather than quality. There were collections of artifacts rather than a selection of representative samples of true professional growth. More description of activities were included versus reflection of the activities and their impact on the teaching and learning process. In essence, these teachers' portfolios' were reflective of what might be evaluated as a means of completing something rather than an assessment of the professional growth process. On the other hand, other teachers began the reflective process and were quite selective in what was included in their "portfolios." For example, one teacher began with reading an article about cooperative learning. Instead of merely placing a copy of the article in the portfolio, there was a reaction and reflective statements written in reference to the article and how it would be utilized in the classroom. Following the reaction to the articles, lesson plans and pictures of the students involved in the activity were included. Finally, reflective statements made by the teacher assessing the effectiveness of the activity along with student reflections were included.

From the variation of portfolios submitted came the need to explore the difference between the product oriented and process oriented portfolios. Differences were explored and documented and a training module for administrators and teachers was developed to address the development of the professional portfolio for certified personnel. Key points were inclusive of the following:

1) It was the **quality** of the activity and not the quantity of activities that enhanced the process of instructional supervision;

2) A **selection** of activities versus a collection of activities needed to be the focus;

3) Teachers and administrators were encouraged to **reflect** on what was chosen and why it was chosen and not merely make a description;

4) **An assessment** and not an evaluation of the items included promoted discussion among all involved; and

5) The portfolio was to encourage **professional growth**, not credentialism.

Secondly, it was quite evident throughout the process that the more process oriented the portfolios at local schools, the greater the collaboration and collegiality among individuals. One such comment was written in response to an open-ended question. "The portfolios may have been required, but the collaboration that came out of them was not mandated; it just grew out of the system." There was consensus among state department personnel, supervisors, administrators and teachers that the portfolio functioned as a tool that enhanced the individual growth experience and in return fostered collaboration and collegiality at the school level. The individual professional growth that was incurred through the teacher evaluation process helped to support the overall school improvement process. The relationship among school improvement, teacher evaluation and professional growth was quite clear. The relationship was not linear by any means, but was indicative of a continuous cycle. The school improvement focus was supported by professional growth and teacher evaluation and vice versa. Professional growth was an integral part of the teacher evaluation plan. It was the meshing of the two, professional growth and teacher evaluation, that was related to school improvement goals. Each individual teacher's professional growth plan by the end of the second year of the study, was in direct relation to school improvement goals and objectives as well as a reflection of his/her self-evaluation and administrator evaluation. For example, an overall goal

was to improve the teaching and learning process and the objective was to increase faculty knowledge of methods and techniques of instruction and assessment. The teacher's professional growth plan that was reflected in the portfolio addressed the need to become more knowledgeable of motivational techniques that would increase task-related behavior. The teacher saw the relationship between increasing task-related behavior and improving the teaching learning process. As the teacher was gathering, synthesizing and utilizing this information in the classroom, the evaluator concentrated on motivational techniques during observation. This emphasized the importance of the teacher's professional growth plan and the relationship to the school improvement plan.. An even more interrelated example in this school's improvement process was the goal of promoting community and parental involvement, the objective of involving parents and community in the education of students and how this overlaps with the goal of increasing problem-solving skills of students and the objective to increase the use of manipulatives in mathematics and science instruction. A teacher's professional growth plan focused on the need to become more knowledgeable in means of using hands-on science activities which was another relationship to the school improvement plan. This goal and objective was extended by a group of teachers to a "science night" where the community was invited to participate in science related activities which students had been involved. Thus, the incorporation of the individual professional growth exhibited in the professional portfolio had a tremendous impact on the whole school improvement plan. The plans moved from individuality to allow an entire faculty and/or a departments within faculties to focus on school improvement activities that were particular to the local school. The professional portfolio was a tool that exhibited professional growth plans that addressed school wide goals.

Finally, the more involved the faculty became in developing individual portfolios, the more value was placed on the collaborative culture of the school. The subsequent comment reinforces this generalization. "This system with the use of portfolios has broken down the "us" (teachers) versus "them (administrators and supervisors) attitude; it fosters a more collaborative relationship, thus leading to better education in each local education agency and ultimately the state."

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Appendices

FN109
Revised '94

SELF-EVALUATION FORM
Instructional Personnel

Name:_____ Position:_____

Complete items A, B, and C at the beginning of the evaluative period. Complete items D and E at the end of the evaluative period.

A. Reflect on your past teaching performance and responsibilities. What goes well on a daily basis? What changes might you make to strengthen your performance? "√" the area(s) below which is most outstanding for you and place an "x" in the area(s) you wish to strengthen. It is not mandatory that all areas have a "√" or an "x", only those you wish to address.

_____ Maximum use of time

_____ Lesson organization

_____ Monitoring and maintaining student behavior

_____ Directions and assignments

_____ Records current and up-to-date

_____ Task-related behavior (attention and interest)

_____ Questioning techniques

_____ Other _____

_____ Classroom routines

_____ Informal assessment

_____ Aids/materials

_____ Classroom appearance

_____ Planning

_____ Professional Growth

B. Why did you "√" the area(s) as a strength? _____

_____

_____

C. Why did you "x" the area(s) as in need of strengthening?_____

_____

_____

D. What new learning occurred regarding these areas during the evaluative period?_____

_____

E. Reviewed on _____
Date

2-Part

Plan for:

FN100
Revised '94

Year 1 ____
Year 2 ____

Livingston Parish Schools

Professional Growth Plan
To Strengthen or Enhance Job Performance

Employee _____ Position _____

I. **Goal** - What broad area do you plan to strengthen?

Objective - What specific method will you use to strengthen that area?

II. **Rationale** - Why do you want to strengthen this area?

III. **Action Plan** - What is your Plan of Action?

Activities	Timelines

IV. **Evaluation** - How will you evaluate the effectiveness of this objective?

Comments: _____

_____

PRE-EVALUATION CONFERENCE

_____ _____
Evaluator's Signature Position/Date

_____ _____
Evaluatee's Signature Date